

US EPA RECORDS CENTER REGION 5



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Feared they were buried there

6/16 TRIB

2 illegal chemical waste dumps probed

METROPOLITAN SANITARY District officials investigating two illegal chemical waste dumps on the Far South Side believe hundreds of drums filled with unknown wastes could be buried beneath one of the sites.

Stanley Whitebloom, the district's pollution control chief, said new information came to light Saturday indicating the two dump sites could contain much more hazardous waste than originally believed.

On Tuesday, district officials found 13,000 gallons of acidic waste in an abandoned grain silo near 121st Street and Cottage Grove Avenue. On Thursday, 100,000 gallons of the material was discovered in the lower level of another grain silo about a quarter mile east of 119th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue.

IN ADDITION, Whitebloom said, the 121st Street site was littered with 100 to 200 drums. All but 30 to 50 had leaked their contents.

"What appears to be synthetic resins, paints, and pigments were in all the drums," Whitebloom said.

In two filled-in lagoons, the officials found paint wastes, thinner, solvents, and what Whitebloom described as "oil,

probably laden with PCBs."

Polychlorinated biphenyl, an industrial chemical once widely used in making electrical equipment, plastic products, and lubricants, has been linked to cancer in laboratory animals. The Environmental Protection Agency has banned its manufacture.

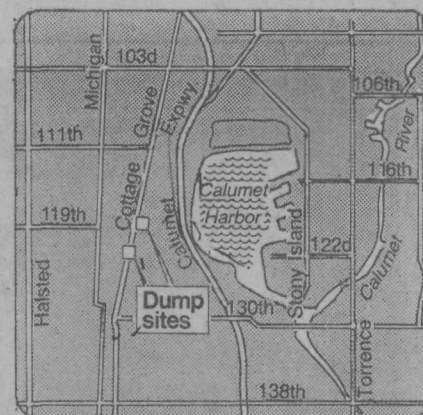
Near the site is a 1/2-mile long unused drainage ditch that is mostly filled with a dark sludge that Whitebloom also believes is PCB-laden oil.

"THERE'S NO legal way to dispose of that kind of oil in Illinois," Whitebloom said, "and it won't burn like normal oil, so that makes it a prime candidate for illegal dumping."

Whitebloom said a brick tossed into the drainage canal rested on the surface of the sludge for five minutes.

Lab tests on the 13,000 gallons of waste showed that it contained chemicals left over from metal-plating processes and "pickle liquor," which is used to remove rust and scales from metal.

Whitebloom said any of a thousand companies could have manufactured the chemical waste, but the pickle liquor would have been used by a steel-processing company.



Tribune Map

NO ONE KNOWS how the chemical got there or who put them there. Since the 113,000 gallons are not in drums, tracing the waste will be difficult, he said.

Penn Central Corp. owns the land where the 100,000 gallons of waste was found, so it will be responsible for cleaning up the waste. Whitebloom said he talked to company officials on Friday.

"They were extremely concerned," he

said. "I think they will be cooperative, but they most definitely did not dump the chemicals."

The owner of the smaller dump site is unknown. Whitebloom said the last owner was U.S. Scrap Corp., which was forced under a court order to clean up a similar illegal dump at the site in 1977. Sanitary district officials have been unable to contact executives of the corporation.

IF THE OWNERS of the site can not be found, Whitebloom said, federal money will be used to pay for the cleanup, which Whitebloom said would "run into millions."

Large amounts of lead, iron, chromium, and zinc were found in chemical wastes, but since few people live in the area and no evidence of leakage has been found, the dumps pose no immediate health hazard, he said.

Right now, the acidic waste is giving off a rotten-egg odor, but, Whitebloom said, the walls of the silos are "very thick." He said, "It would take years for the acid to leak out, but you don't store acid waste in unprotected concrete vessels."